Mythopoeic Society MYTHLORE A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

Volume 10
Number 4

Article 13

1984

Donaldson as Heir to Tolkien

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Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico • Postponed to: July 30 – August 2, 2021

Abstract

Examines concerns shared by Donaldson and Tolkien, and traces the development of the fantasy "everyman" hero from Bilbo to Covenant. Applies Northrop Frye's definitions of the hero to both authors' works. Includes chart of parallels, covering similar concerns and techniques and the continuum of characters.

Additional Keywords

Donaldson, Stephen R. The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant—Comparison to J.R.R. Tolkien; Frye, Northrop. The Anatomy of Criticism—Relation to The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant; Frye, Northrop. The Anatomy of Criticism—Relation to The Lord of the Rings; Heroes in J.R.R. Tolkien; Heroes in Stephen R. Donaldson; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Influence on Stephen R. Donaldson

Donaldson as Heir to Tolkien

Christine Barkley

Writing in the tradition and genre of J.R.R. Tolkien, Stephen R. Donaldson is the foremost epic fantasy writer of our time. Both Tolkien and Donaldson share many similar concerns: the importance of community; the necessity for recapturing the wonder of nature, of time, of space, of life itself; the ability to perceive in new ways, through heightened senses; the need for a changed view of death and immortality and of the role of heroes. Most important today, in our world which has lost faith in itself, is the emphasis both Tolkien and Donaldson give to our need for a sense of purpose, our desire to believe in an overarching universe controlled by a Divine Being with a plan not only for the world as a whole but with an individual purpose for every common man. Though the role of the artist and the duties of the hero have changed, the purpose for writing or reading fantasy remains clear: to alleviate our sense of alienation from each other, to restore the wasteland of our private lives and world, and to recapture a sense of wonder and purpose. Donaldson carries on the task Tolkien had begun, to reeducate a world that had lost sight of its past, to provide hope for an eventual eucatastrophe. Thomas Covenant, Donaldson's usually reluctant hero, is the logical heir to Frodo Baggins as the unlikely common man upon whom the fate of the world rests. There is a logical continuum between Bilbo, Frodo, and Covenant which explains the changes in their personalities as reflections of the changes in the world view of the different time periods of their creation. Following that progression helps to explain why Stephen R. Donaldson should be considered J.R.R. Tolkien's heir apparent.

Bilbo had luck, wit, sharp eyes, and also the moral characteristics of pity, fidelity, and courage (see chart at the end of this article). He ran off to encounter his adventures without even a pocket handkerchief. But in his world no forethought was needed. His dangers were physical ones: trolls, goblins, wargs, spiders, unsympathetic elves, a dragon. In the world of The Hobbit one could avoid danger, as in the Battle of the Five Armies, by disappearing or just not getting involved. His encounters can all be safely called "adventures" for though he learns by them--for example, he uses on the spiders the disembodied voice trick which Gandalf had used to save them all from the trolls--they are not a necessary part of his psychological growth except to give him confidence. He doesn't have to learn or recognize anything about himself.

But by the time of LOTR, Middle Earth had changed. Between Bilbo's time and Frodo's much had happened to the world. The "small business" Gandalf left the Company of dwarves to accomplish--driving Sauron from his strongholds in Dol Guldur--had become an open declaration of war. Though Bilbo was an admirable character in many ways, he was not the proper hero for the new age. Thus Tolkien created an heir for Bilbo in the person--or rather the hobbit--of Frodo. Frodo's qualifications were his perseverance, endurance, ability to inspire strong friendships--especially in Sam and Gollum, strong will power, a sense of moral obligation to the world--despite his innocence he took responsibility for situations not of his own causing (this was a quality Bilbo also exhibited, but on a smaller scale, as he often had to rescue the dwarves). Frodo was also totally innocent in acquiring the Ring.

Neither hobbit was a great fighter or warrior, yet certainly Bilbo was more accomplished than Frodo in physical combat; poor Frodo hardly ever does more than hack at his enemies' feet. But the dangers in Frodo's world are more than physical, though some physical ones remain: orcs, a cave troll, a Balrog, Gollum, distrustful elves or men, Sauron's armies. However, the most serious dangers are not physical: the Black Riders, the undead in the Barrow Downs or on the Paths of the Dead or in the Dead Marshes, the magic of the Old Willow or the power of the Huorns, Saruman's voice or Sauron's ability to compel responses through the use of the Palantir, and of course the power of the Ring, especially its power to corrupt the Bearer (and even those of the Fellowship) into desiring its power, into desiring the supposed safety of its "gift" of invisibility. From this we might conclude that physical prowess is becoming less important in the world-view of Middle Earth, though it still has a place. Moral or spiritual strength seems to be taking its place.

Bilbo, the food-and-cheer-loving hobbit, was not introspective enough to deal with the seriousness of Tolkien's new world-view for Middle Earth. Frodo, on the other hand, was the perfect hero for LOTR; he was aware enough of the outside world to feel concern and pity for the Shire should it lose its innocence; he was innocent of desire himself (even for gold or "adventures"); he was more cautious than Bilbo, procrastinating rather than rushing bravely forward (which may also have saved him some of the temptation Gandalf and Galadriel felt, wishing to use the Ring for good, when it cannot be used so). But Frodo's attributes are important not just because they were the ones needed to accomplish his quest, but because his new characteristics were needed to survive in the new world. His will power saves him at times that Bilbo's bravery would have gotten him in trouble.

And here we come to a fundamental question: why would Tolkien change the world-view of Middle Earth? He was the subcreator; he had control. The Hobbit was successful--so why tamper with success? Tolkien, of course, subscribed to the Declining World theory so deterioration was a necessary element of any change he would incorporate. But why the change from physical to spiritual dangers? I believe Tolkien's subcreation, Middle Earth, also changed in response to his recognition of changes in his real world and his acknowledgement (possibly unconscious) of something I consider axiomatic about great literature: any work of art--film, drama, but especially literature--must not only be universal, and in fantasy this means mythic, echoing age-old conflicts, but must also speak most particularly to its own time-bound audience to be great. It must address the issues, the concerns of its day. It must have something to say to its audience that has not been said before (possibly because it has not been needed), as well as studying in more detail earlier themes, problems our generation has not resolved yet. Each new age has its own fear. Tolkien recognized this in LOTR and Donaldson, I think, does this best of any fantasy writer today.

This is the main reason that I claim Donaldson is Tolkien's spiritual heir. To show how Donaldson's works are not only universal but also reflective of our age, I would like to suggest the changes in our world-view from the time of Tolkien's creation of The Hobbit to LOTR and finally to Donaldson's of the Thomas Covenant trilogies. I also would like to suggest how these changes are incorporated into the subcreations.

Before World War II (the war to end all wars) completely shattered the illusion that World War I had been the war to make the world safe for democracy, at least one world-view with some prominence was the idealistic view that industrialized countries had a responsibility to spread civilization (some thought this meant Christianity) and commerce (prosperity) to the underdeveloped areas of the world via the Commonwealth (or "foreign aid" as we called it). This view was an outcropping of the idealistic 19th Century view of progress which stated that in some Darwinian manner the world was constantly improving, becoming some ideal state (the Advancing World theory). Tolkien is reacting against this. Though Tolkien was born in a Commonwealth country, South Africa, and was undoubtedly exposed to its tenets, he certainly didn't accept them all. However, just as Bilbo was certainly in favor of spreading the wealth of lonely mountain among the men of Dale, the elves of Mirkwood, and the dwarves, so England said it wanted to bring the standard of living in the third world countries up closer to their own level. And, Tolkien admitted the interdependence of groups upon each other (as seen in the trade barrels which traveled from the elven king's halls to Long Lake). In other words, many of the characteristics of the Commonwealth (simplified, of course, and without the political trappings) existed in The Hobbit.

But even before the publication of The Hobbit, the ideals of the Commonwealth era were being eroded and this is reflected in The Hobbit as well. E.M. Forster and Joseph Conrad were forcing us to acknowledge the ulterior motives which corroded such benevolent enterprises--the abuses possible--and the heart of darkness hidden within even the most idealistic Kurtz among us. Thorin's awareness of having done wrongly softens his death for us (as later Boromir's will as well), but it hasn't the same effect as Frodo's recognition of his own lust for power at the Cracks of Doom. Thorin's obsession for gold and especially for the Arkenstone is an exaggerated vice, but it isn't as fearful as the desire for power to dominate others, to control their will promised to the Wearer of the Ring. A heart of darkness was evident in Thorin, but it was not fully explored by Tolkien at that time nor was it as powerful as the force which threatened Frodo. So even in The Hobbit we had the beginning of Tolkien's recognition of the importance of facing the shadow-self. But in The Hobbit it was not the point-of-view character who underwent the soul-searching, and Thorin obviously did so off-stage. Frodo wasn't even the point-of-view character while his inner conflict was taking place--Sam was, but we see an outward expression of it filtered through Sam. Covenant, however, is center screen and in close-up when he must not only face the fact of his rape of Lena but must also recognize how similar his own act was to the obvious evil choreographed by Lord Foul (the attack on the wraiths at the Celebration of Spring, for example). So, the concerns of the first world-view incorporated into the Secondary World of that time, Bilbo's Middle Earth, are carried over to Frodo's and later to Covenant's time and are examined more fully each time. Each fantasy builds on the other and introduces new elements: new elements appropriate to its time period.

The time period of the creation of LOTR, slightly before and during WWII, found us in the real world concerned with the possibility of being dominated and controlled by a group of people calling themselves the Master Race and claiming superiority over us (and for awhile exhibiting superior physical prowess). We weren't as concerned with the hoarding or redistribution of wealth (as in The Hobbit) as we were with the possible destruction of groups of people (the Jews) or ways of life (separate countries in Europe). These concerns are echoed in LOTR through Boromir's desire for aid for Gondor lest it be conquered by Mordor and the concerns of the hobbits and elves that life in the Shire and Lothlorien will not be as before.

In the Covenant trilogies there are similar concerns, especially in Ill Earth War and Power That Preserves, when Foul's armies headed by Giant Ravers attack the people of the Land. The destruction of (most of) the wraiths and hence the abandonment of the Celebration of Spring ritual and the diminution of the Ranyhyn herd seem to carry out the fear of a changed world, dreaded but not realized in LOTR. And, of course, the genocide of the Giants at Coercri fulfills our worst fears about the destruction of a whole people and an important culture. But the Declining World theory (for which the fading of Lothlorien was a poignant but gradual example in LOTR) is even more devastatingly exemplified by the changes that take place in the Land between the end of the first Chronicle and the beginning of the second. The fear of new generations losing the wisdom and beauty of the old (like the loss felt by the Fellowship in Hollin, Moria, and at the pillars of the Argonath, and by the ents in Fangorn) is shockingly realized in The Wounded Land when Covenant revisits Mithil Stonedown which has lost not only reverence for stonework but reverence for life as well. And, of course, the Clave can be seen to represent a successful domination of the Land by a "Master Race." Once again, some of the concerns of the world when LOTR was written are examined within the fantasy world of that time and continue to be explored in fuller detail in the Thomas Covenant trilogies.

Our central concern today is no longer that we recognize within ourselves a secret desire for domination over others, over our environment, over death itself, in essence over God--and that we fear in others the capability for control over us. Not that these concerns no longer exist; they do. Experience is cumulative. We cannot go back to a previously possessed innocence. So any literature which helps us deal (subconsciously, allegorically, symbolically) with our fears (of a secret self, of being dominated) will be universal from now on. For example, today we fear a Mideast oil embargo or Soviet missiles too close to our mainland or some bloodthirsty group in possession of nuclear weapons or nerve gas: those fears still are very real. So one nation, one tyrant could threaten us as Hitler did England or Sauron did the Free Peoples or the na-Mhoram did the people of the Wounded Land. We must continue to learn to deal with this kind of threat. And that is why today's fantasies must continue to examine yesterday's problems as well as our own.

Now, in the time of the creation of the Thomas Covenant trilogies, as our global interdependence increases--our economic, political, and environmental interdependence--the possibilities of coercive control (like that exerted magically by the One Ring) increases geometrically. Today in order to destroy each country's possible level of control over us, we'd need dozens of Frodos to make several trips each to the Cracks of Doom. Therefore, the fantasies which will touch this generation most forcefully, which will not seem more naive or innocent than we are, will need a new hero, one who can operate in a world in which the dangers cannot be destroyed or unmade, no matter how brave he is, no matter how he perseveres, no matter how strong his personal willpower is.

Now, the concept of unmaking the bomb, like dropping the Ring into the Cracks of Doom as a solution to all our problems, thus destroying not only the object of the threat but the knowledge to recreate it, is a simplistic solution to the problem and would have been recognized as such by Tolkien. But in fairy tales we find ways to accomplish the goals our hearts desire most, and we suspend our disbelief if the result is at least somewhat credible within its own context (following the laws of the Secondary World). So the spokesman for our age will not have to come with a foolproof plan for alleviating our fears, destroying those things which threaten us, solving the world's problems, but must only help us to feel hope again that this too shall pass away--we will survive this era. In other words, he doesn't have to show in scientific (or magical) detail just how the wasteland will be cured, but only give us the assurance that it is.

So what are the fears which plague us today (besides those already mentioned connected with military power and aggression)? Among our central concerns are the possible irreversible pollution of our ecology, the depletion of our energy sources, the possible extinction of endangered species and the way that might affect the rest of the animal and plant kingdom, and military aggression gone haywire, or in other words, total annihilation. We cannot fight these dangers--pollution, extinction, a wasteland created by atomic war--using physical means, or even spiritual control over our own wills (though that might help stop the deterioration). And idealogical controls--talking, arguing, even ad campaigns--are not working so well either. One major dilemma is that today's problems are not centralized. These problems would seem undefeatable (but then WWII's problems seemed so at the time). We need a hero who can defeat the undefeatable, preferably not through conventional means (or we should have tried it already). A nice epic hero would do, someone with control over the environment. But, unfortunately, though we cheer such a hero on, our "realistic" world-view is too experienced: we like superheroes but we can't identify with them so we cannot believe theirs is a legitimate solution to our problems. Besides, that is just one other excuse for not acting ourselves, waiting for someone else to solve our problems for us. We must find a way that the common man, the hobbits of the world, the readers of the fantasy, even the lepers can hope to cope themselves. Covenant, believe it or not, is the perfect hero for our age.

Covenant brings with him to the fantasy world all our knowledge, the painful experience we've acquired in learning to face our own culpabilities, our loss of innocence. He also embodies our sense of alienation, our disillusionment with the view of a future utopia, our feelings of impotence in the face of the world's problems. Actually, he was undoubtedly created as a leper precisely to be able to exaggerate these characteristics. As a leper he has "lost touch"--he has lost a way to connect himself to his world, and, second only to sight for us, we rely more on touch than on any other sense to validate the world. And, in fact, in the second trilogy, Covenant loses his land-born sight and does not regain his sense of touch (still has his leprosy) so he is doubly bereft. (Luckily for us, through Linden and also through the Giants teaching us to value more highly another sense--sound, especially via stories--we the readers learn new ways to compensate for this loss.)

Covenant begins as an anti-hero reluctant to act at all, for whenever he involves himself in the Land's fights either he causes pain (to Lena or to Elena or to the Unfettered One and the small animals or to countless others who have to save him--the Ranyhyn, for example) or he does evil himself (the killing at Soaring Woodhelven). Even when he finally understands the nature of the power he possesses through the white gold, like Mhoram with his knowledge of the power to cause desecration, he is still reluctant, restraining his power like a Superpower in our world sitting tightly on the lid of its arsenal capable of destroying the world ten times over. If Bilbo's world valued bravery and cunning, and Frodo's moral fortitude and dedication, Covenant's advocates restraint and acceptance.

Covenant, as a descendant of Tolkien's fantasy tradition, also possesses many characteristics Frodo needed to cope with the spiritual or idealogical dangers of his world: endurance, strong will power, sense of moral obligation and rightness, and in addition, he has already recognized his own heart of darkness (so we won't have to worry about that test coming at the end where failure might occur with no Gollum around to save the quest). The rape of Lena occurs early in the story and, therefore, throughout his entire sojourn in the Land he must be wary of the destruction he knows he is capable of or what his failure to perform might cost others (not that he's always willing to admit responsibility, but there's always that nagging thought that if this is his dream, then he--or his subconscious--is in control and is therefore responsible). So in a sense, Covenant begins at a point Frodo doesn't reach until the end. He loses his innocence and must learn to function without it, with no Grey Havens to sail from or time to heal the wound of its loss. But Covenant eventually goes beyond the recognition state--he learns to integrate both sides of himself (innocence and knowledge, impotence and power, anger as power and compassion as wisdom, venom and wild magic, dependence on others and independence, disbelief and commitment, life and death).

Donaldson's insistence on the total acceptance and integration of opposites sets him apart in a major way from Tolkien. As Tolkien's dialectical world of pure good and evil in conflict with each other was Medieval in nature, Donaldson's world of unified oppositions, of juxtaposed contraries is Renaissancian. Throughout most of LOTR, even when good and evil exist within the same character, Gollum for instance, they are battling for dominance. The juxtaposition of opposites in Tolkien is more external--it has more of an oxymoronic quality--a vision of the fiery darkness of the Balrog or the union of youth and age in the countenance of

Arwen or Elrond. Both qualities exist but they are not fused; they are separate opposites. Finally, in Tolkien towards the end, the binary oppositions become more internalized and are seen as emotional qualities and hence much of the joy of the final sections is bittersweet; Frodo is both hero and failure within himself; though Middle Earth is saved, it is also lessened by the passing of the elves. The very last line of the book, Sam's "Well, I'm home," has always seemed both joyful and sad at the same time to me. In Donaldson the juxtapositions are emphatically internal, not just outward shows of superimposed opposite images but fused together as deliberately as the venom and wild magic were by the Banefire. The Giant's two symbols, Stone and Sea, permanence at rest and permanence in motion, are another good example of this.

And this, in essence, is what is also exemplified by Covenant's differing role in the two trilogies, necessitated by the different views of the Land. Donaldson is saying that opposites are needed to balance each other. In the first trilogy Covenant is the ironic anti-hero in a Romantic/heroic world. In the second, because the world is now ironic, he tries to be a Romantic hero--and might have the power, the ability to control his environment, if it weren't for the venom and that he is hampered by the ironic world that even his new power cannot cure. But obviously both awarenesses are necessary at the same time. This may also explain the original need for the frame tale literary device. And the need for the heroic vision as well as ironic awareness is what both Tolkien and Donaldson are trying to convince our world of.

One other way to show the progression from Bilbo to Frodo to Covenant is to examine each hero as he would be defined by Northrup Frye in his Anatomy of Criticism, since integral to his theory is the concept of change or progression from one level to the next in a specific order. (Please see the summary of Frye's argument at the end.) The epic hero is superior to man in kind (he is a god, for example) and also has control of his environment (stories from the Valaquenta of the Valar would fit this category.) The Romantic hero is superior by degree and also possesses the virtue of some method of controlling the environment--a magic sword, a shield of invulnerability, knowledge of Earthpower (Beren and Kevin are obvious examples). Bilbo would fit into Frye's High Mimetic mode; he is superior by degree, but only to the dwarves for he is the one who must rescue them. The Ring gives a kind of superiority over his environment but it is limited since he can still be found, bumped into, or starved through lack of food in his invisible state. Nor does it protect him from a common cold or a bump on the head. Frodo belongs on the Low Mimetic level. He is clearly the common man hero, chosen as protagonist over more likely (more powerful, more Romantic) heroes. His heroic characteristics are not those learned in battle or even in the great council seats but strengths possibly found in even the humblest of hearts. He is mostly equal to his environment, though in Mordor the wasteland of Gorgoroth threatens to overpower him and he almost slips into the ironic mode. Covenant clearly begins in the ironic mode. Even within his "real" world, as a leper he is relegated to a position subservient or at least socially inferior to others. Though in the Land he is acclaimed a Romantic hero with a potential power over the environment greater than that of the Lords, and though he even somehow inexplicably uses the power occasionally, his lack of knowledge about the wild magic and his lack of conscious control of the white gold relegate him to the ironic mode still. Even at the beginning of the second trilogy, when the wasteland he traverses and cannot cure is so evident and he is hampered by the venom just as he may be about to learn control of his power (Donaldson's Catch 22), Covenant is still the ironic hero unable to break into the epic of romantic modes, even though now he yearns to. However, as the story progresses, Covenant grows in stature.

Frye suggests a progression from Epic to Romantic to High Mimetic to Low Mimetic to Ironic and then back to Epic. He claims literature has existed in the ironic mode since about 1920 with publications by James Joyce and T.S. Eliot. Within the ironic age most writers (mainstream and fantasy writers also) deal with certain modern themes: the effects of alienation, the devastation of the wasteland, and especially the loss of purpose. Tolkien strove for a vision of Cosmic Harmony; Donaldson's "unified sensibilities" attempt the same sort of recapturing of that sense of purpose. In mainstream literature, the ironic age seems to spark two dominant views about the seemingly inevitable futility of this age. In both cases we see that in the past, meaning existed but that it has been lost and we either 1) bewail the depth of our fall, say "woe is me" and question or satirize 20th century values. James Joyce's Ulysses is the epitome of this view where nothing is heroic, and the modern world is tawdry in comparison with the past but there is nothing to be done. Covenant seems to embrace this philosophy when he first arrives in the Land--in reaction to Lena's report of Atiaran and Trell's marriage or in describing the poverty and crime of his "real" world to Mhoram, the "real" world always suffers in comparison and seems unredeemable. Or 2), the other major approach to the loss of meaning in our ironic world is found in works like D.H. Lawrence's Women in Love. There some harmony or pattern or meaning or purpose for living still exists but we have to find it within our own experiences. Here we must try to create a free and useful life despite the industrial, dehumanizing atmosphere. Usually meaning is best found by getting back to nature. Obviously Tolkien subscribes to this view. His pastoral ideal, the myth of the carefree country life, sustains not only Frodo and Sam as they eat rabbit stew on the border of Mordor, but also Theoden when Merry wishes to share the pleasures of pipe weed with him, or Aragorn when he rejoices at the discovery of the white tree. Tolkien's obvious symbol or standard of the Pastoral ideal is Lothlorien, just as Andelain is for Donaldson. For Covenant is "rescued" from his early despair based on his depth-of-our-fall view and given a more optimistic belief that perhaps redemption, rediscovery of meaning is yet possible through the beauty of the Land. And when he accepts this he changes from an ironic anti-hero to a romantic hero. It is the memory of the unspoiled Land which motivates him when he must cope with Lord Foul at the end of both The Power that Preserves and White Gold Wielder. Thus Donaldson acknowledges both dominant views of our ironic age but chooses the one, also advocated by Tolkien, which provides the most hope. In fact, both authors are saying that the purpose of fantasy is to help us in the ironic world recapture or recover meaning through a view of the Golden Age (necessarily in the past or separated by space or available only in our imaginations). Imagination provides the link from realistic beauty (still found if sparsely in the ironic world) to Idealized Beauty--in the Renaissance sense of that word.

However, if we are in an ironic age now and if

Frye's progression continues to hold, then the next step is to return to the epic mode. Frye says,

> irony descends from the low mimetic; it beginsin realism and dispassionate observation. But as it does so, it moves steadily toward myth, and the dim outlines of sacrificial rituals and dying gods begin to reappear in it. (Anatomy of Criticism, p. 42)

This is the direction Donaldson seems to be heading. Covenant's self-sacrifice for Joan's sake and eventually his martyrdom when he had become larger than life and so powerful that with little effort he could have destroyed the Arch of Time fit better into the mode of epic tragedy than ironic. Clearly he is no longer the hero completely dominated by his inferiority to other men or to his environment. But he has also learned not to try to dominate.

And at last we come to another major function of the artist to both Tolkien and Donaldson, that of mythmaker, epic writer. We need a mythmaker to lead us out of our ironic age and to reestablish that sense of purpose we are lacking.

And the other progression we would like to make is from tragedy back to comedy, thus alleviating another we of our modern world: our sense of alienation. Using Frye's definition of comedy as the integration of the hero back into his community or society at the end of the tale and tragedy as his alienation from his community, we can see that Bilbo's story is clearly a comedy throughout. In fact, though he leaves the Shire physically, he is never alienated from any society the way Rosalind is banished from the Court in As You Like It, for example. Even on his journey he is with the Company except when he is with Gollum, and even then he was not deliberately abandoned. Bilbo doesn't feel any alienation. Frodo doesn't at first and has companions for most of his journey (though their number dwindles), but despite the happy ending to the quest, there is no fairy tale "and he lived happily ever after" for Frodo. His tale ends in tragedy with a self-imposed sense of alienation. Covenant begins alienated from those in his own world (though it was not always the case) and he also feels set apart from the inhabitants of the Land. But by the end of the first trilogy he has been accepted into a community within the Land and also won a place in his own "real" society through his rescue of the little girl, though he still chooses to remain outside of it. When he chooses to go back to the Land at the beginning of the second trilogy he actively seeks a community which includes Sunder, Hollian, the Haruchai, and eventually the Search. He earns an important place in the society of the Land, as does Linden when she heals the Sunbane. Linden also has learned that there is love in the world and would be more ready to fit into her "real" world as well. So the pendulum has begun to swing back from tragedy to comedy.

It seems clear that one reason fantasy (especially epic fantasy) is so important today is that we desperately need to escape from our ironic view of the world and its depressing side-effects: a sense of alienation, the sterility of the wasteland, and the loss of meaning in our modern world. Only imagination seems to be able to provide the necessary vision, usually arising from a sense of the importance of the past and of the idealistic beauty of nature. Seen as a continuum, Tolkien's and Donaldson's works trace a history of the modern ironic age. Actually the progression is not quite complete, though it is clear that it is heading in the direction of epic or romantic comedy with a reemergence of the sense of the importance of the community or unity, a recovery of wonder, and the rediscovery of purpose through service to something worthwhile. Both Tolkien and Donaldson leave us with the feeling that this is not only achievable but inevitable.

Similar Concerns

I. Sense of Community
  A. Central locations
    1. Shire
    2. Mithil Stonedown
      a. marriage of Trell and Atiaran
      b. defense of homes
  B. Gathering of people
    1. Company
    2. Fellowship-- representatives of all Free Peoples
      a. where responsibilities lie, where needed most
      b. separate tasks appointed, all necessary
    3. Revelstone
      a. councils
      b. haven for all during war
    4. Search
  C. Gifts
II. Recapturing Wonder -- Recovery
  A. of beauty
    1. Tolkien (Lorien, Cerin Amroth)
    2. Donaldson (Andelain, Dance of Wraiths)
  B. of time
    1. Tolkien
      a. in Lothlorien -- Galadriel seen as already passed into memory
      b. in elves -- immortality
    2. Donaldson
      a. Land and "real" world
      b. immortality and longevity through service
      c. relativity (Giants, Kasreyn)
  C. of space
    1. Tolkien
      a. LBN walk into forest
      b. SWM see bird across valley, Living Flower
    2. Donaldson
      a. Elohim fountains
      b. Land and "real" world
  D. of life
    1. Tolkien
      a. tree in Lorien
      b. sentient trees, stone with memory
    2. Donaldson
      a. healer
      b. forestals
      c. Linden's perception of Land's pain
III. New perceptions
  A. of death and immortality
    1. dialectical views (opposites)
      a. bad: Black Riders, breaking of Law of Death (enforced servitude)
      b. good: Bombadil, Bloodguards' and Lords' prolonged life for service, Theoden's desire for immortality through legend
    2. juxtaposed views (combined)
      a. elves (glorious yet sad)

b. Luthien dies but her line is immortal
c. Numenoreans view of death
d. Covenant at end of WGW
e. Bloodguard (service yet cost)

B. of senses
1. Frodo in Lorien "no colors but those he knew"
2. change in appearance of Ringbearer in Rivendell and in Mordor
3. expanded awareness
a. in Tolkien
1) Ring, sight and sound especially
2) see memory (Gandalf, Faery Queen in SWM)
b. in Donaldson
1) see health, illness
2) comprehend murder
3) read people's moral attitude
4. change in awareness
a. Giants "Joy is in the ears that hear"
b. of Elohim and Vain re/moral obligations

C. of heroism
1. similarities, though different from our world
a. role of epic hero -- fail or be called away (Gandalf, Kevin)
b. role of romantic hero -- secondary battles (Aragorn, Lords, Giants)
c. role of ironic hero -- accomplish quest but by default or in a different manner (Frodo, Covenant)
2. differences
a. Tolkien
1) to do and endure and sneak past evil
2) to fight against heart of darkness
b. Donaldson
1) to refrain from doing and confront evil
2) to integrate 2 sides within self (power and venom, Findail and Vain)

IV. Sense of Purpose
A. Overarching universe--predestination
1. prophecies and predictions (more enigmatic attempt to reestablish bond with nature
2. fate -- Frodo, Covenant chosen
3. need for "unified sensibilities"
4. attempt to reestablish bond with nature
a. broken by industrial revolution
b. through return to simple country life
c. through regained contact with Earthpower (Elohim, One Tree)
d. through restoration of proper ecology

B. role of artist
1. purpose of fantasy
a. for Tolkien
1) explore time and space
2) converse with other beings
b. for Donaldson
1) ability of dreams to "heal other afflictions"
2) reveal deeper truths than "realism" can
2. how artist accomplishes purpose
a. tells of heroism (Red Book of Westmarch)
b. treatises on power of guilt
c. TC trilogies
3. impotence of logic
a. in T--creativity + language
(incarnate mind, tongue, tale exist together)
b. in D--inability to resolve question of reality of Land
4. resolve conflict between imagination and reality
a. modern view--imagination found in dreams/nightmares, reality better
b. Renaissance view--imagination glimpses higher truths, closer to ultimate reality
5. resolve loss of meaning
a. depth of our fall (Covenant in real world)
b. rediscover meaning (Covenant in Land, Frodo in ME)
6. "myth maker" (mythopoiea)
a. Silmarillion
b. several myths re/creator in TC

C. Purpose of Quest
1. deal with issue of Power
a. possible dialectical views
1) bad: One Ring, Power of Command, uncontrolled use of white gold
2) good: song to assuage grief ("When evening..." and "Death reaps..."; power of fellowship and laughter (Tom B, Gandalf over Saruman, Foamfollower, Pitchwife); stories (Strider, Sam, Giants)
b. how to deal with power
1) T to destroy -- "absolute power corrupts absolutely"
2) D to resist and integrate (Blake's and Shaw's view of energy)
2. restoration of wasteland
a. origins of wasteland
1) our fault
a) T--decay through progress, modernization
b) D--decay through moral corruption (lose sight of nature, but worse, lose sight of our responsibility to nature)
2) deliberate destruction by Sauron and Foul
b. how accomplished
1) T--restored when evil defeated, with help by Sam
2) D--healed by accepting the pain of it, Linden Avery

D. Importance of free will

Similar Techniques

I. Introduction into Secondary World
A. in T--history: Red Book of Westmarch -- separation in time
B. in D--frame tale -- separation in space, then also in time

II. Journey through
A. limited point of view -- least knowledgeable character
1. mostly Frodo, Merry, Pippin, Sam in Mordor
2. mostly Covenant, Hile Troy or Mhoram in battle, Korik in Gilden-Fire, Linden Avery whenever Covenant seems in control or unconscious
B. style of language

1. different for different peoples
   a. Rohirrim, elves, hobbits, orcs
   b. Giants, Lords, Elohim, Braithnar, Covenant
2. style of interaction
   a. conflict based on historical prejudices (elves and dwarves)
   b. conflict based on psychological differences / differences in perceiving the world / cultural differences
   c. D includes thought pattern so dialogue more obscure
3. use of poetry
   a. Road Song as symbolic of LOTR
   b. "Something there is in beauty..." and Code for TC

Continuum from Bilbo to Covenant

High Mimetic

BILBO

Characteristics

luck, wit, sharp eyes, pity, fidelity, love of food and cheer, lack of greed, thief. loner by nature, becomes part of Company

gave up comfort freely, later gave up Ring freely

active character -- rather likes role of hero

heroics: physical

how he fights vs. what he accomplishes

physical: stands to kill spiders, rescues dwarves
psycho: gives up Arkenstone, prevents battle

accomplishes quest (not theft of dragon's treasure but return of Thorin's treasure

His World

physical dangers
"adventures": There and Back Again
personally in danger, life threatened

Our World

physical dangers (WWI)
High idealism (Commonwealth)
Greatest fear is fear itself

Low Mimetic

FRODO

Characteristics

endurance, perseverance, dedication, strong will, sense of moral rightness, sharpened sight and hearing because of Ring
gave up life in Shire freely, gave up peace, innocence

passive character -- accepts role

heroics: endurance, steadfastness

how he fights vs. what he accomplishes

physical: attacks feet, accomplishes what Boromir could not

psycho: perseveres, gets to Mount Doom

fails personal quest, though quest accomplished

His World

physical and spiritual dangers
"adventures" for Merry and Pippin
"quest" for Frodo, Aragorn
personally in danger and his failure would harm others

Our World

physical dangers/idealogical dangers (Master Race, Superman, racial prejudice)
Awareness of Heart of Darkness
Fear of Tyrant, being controlled or dominated
Greatest fear is what we are capable of doing ourselves

Ironic

COVENANT

Characteristics

endurance, strong will not to give up, sense of moral rightness, recognition of heart of darkness, integrated self, sense of reality, heightened senses

gave up life freely (sanity?)

anti-active character -- rejects role -- anti-hero

His World

physical, spiritual and psychological dangers

"quests" for Prothall, Elena, The Search
"survival tactics" for Covenant, Linden
personally in danger, his failure jeopardizes others within fantasy world, also universal destruction

heroics -- martyrdom

how he fights vs. what he accomplishes

grovels but accomplishes goal

accomplishes quest but not in manner originally intended
(abolishes anger for laughter, self-immolation for unity, self-destruction becomes rescue, defeat is way to victory)

doesn't accomplish personal purposes
(abrogating responsibility, "pull down Foul's creche around his ears," force One Tree

Our World

physical, ideological, psychological dangers
(terrorism, religious fanaticism)
(inability to control irreversible pollution, extinction, hopelessness for future)

Greatest fear is having run out of time to right the wrongs we've done already/total annihilation

from Northrup Frye's Anatomy of Criticism

Epic	hero / man	hero / environment	
Romantic	hero / man (in degree)	hero / environment	
High Mimetic	hero / man (in degree)	hero = environment	Comedy = hero integrated back into society at end
Low Mimetic	hero = man	hero = environment	Tragedy = hero alienated from society at end
Ironic	man / hero	environment / man	

The Official Response

(The morning after the incident of
"The Emperor's New Clothes")

The latest word from the palace
is spread throught the land.
Horsemen ride; trumpets blast;
heralds shout in every square:

"Quite true it is our Lord is naked.
This hath from him no glory taked.
There never were such things as clothes;
'tis all a hoax contrived by foes,
to undermine the splendor of our state."

"Let loyal subjects stand and hear.
Only traitors need have fear."

The word is spread throught the land.
Horsemen ride; trumpets blast;
heralds shout in every square.

--- Darrell Schweitzer